

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks in Kansas City, Missouri

July 30, 2014

The President. Hello, Kansas City! Well, it is good to be back in Kansas City, back in the Midwest. And I have to say, I love these old theaters. I mean, they are unbelievable. This is just gorgeous.

The—it is good to see Governor Jay Nixon here today. Congressman Emanuel Cleaver is here. Congressman Lacy Clay is here. Mayor Sly James is here. And you're here! All of you are here.

Now, if you have a seat, feel free to sit down, because I don't want everybody starting to fall out. [*Laughter*] If you don't have a seat, don't sit down. But bend your knees a little bit.

It's always good to spend a little time in Kansas City. Last night, I had a chance to get some barbecue at Arthur Bryant's. Now, they had run out of coleslaw, which I asked—I said, did you save some coleslaw for me? They said, no, they hadn't saved any.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. The—I'm sorry, what are you hollering about?

Audience member. Jesus is the God of Israel. He is fully God.

The President. I believe in God. Thanks for the prayer. Amen. Thank you. Now——

Audience members. We love you! We love you! We love you!

The President. Thank you. Now, before—I just want to be on record, though, because people have been asking me this question. I deal with a lot of tough issues. I am not going to decide who makes the best barbecue in Kansas City. [*Laughter*] Bryant's barbecue was tasty. And Victor is right, I did plow through it pretty good. [*Laughter*] But I have not had enough samples to make a definitive judgment, so I'm going to have to try some other barbecue next time I come in. I have to say, by the way, Victor was not shy about eating either. [*Laughter*] So I just want to be clear.

But I had a chance—I went there for the barbecue, but also I went there because I wanted to have a chance to talk to Victor and three other people from the area who took the time to sit down with me and talk, because they had written letters to me. Some of you may know——

Audience member. I wrote you too! [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, you know what, if I had known, I would have had you over for dinner too. [*Laughter*]

But what happens is, every night, I read 10 letters that we receive. We get 40,000 correspondence. And then our Correspondence Office chooses 10, sort of a sample for me to take a look at. And it gives me a chance to hear directly from the people I serve. And folks tell me their stories. They tell me their worries and their hopes and their hardships, their successes. Some say I'm doing a good job. But other people say, "You're an idiot."

Audience members. No!

The President. No, no, I mean, this is how I know that I'm getting a good sample of letters.
[Laughter]

Last week, a young girl wrote to ask me, why aren't there any women on our currency? And then she gave me, like, a long list of possible women to put on our dollar bills and quarters and stuff, which I thought was a pretty good idea.

And now, Victor wrote to me to tell me about his life in Butler, and he told me that he had been unemployed for a while after he and his wife had had their first child. But he refused to quit. He earned his degree, found a full-time job. He now helps folks with disabilities live independently. And he's just a good-hearted man. And you can tell, really, he's doing great stuff. And Victor described how he got through some tough times because of his Christian faith and his determination, which are things that government programs and policies can't replace. You've got to have that sense of purpose and perseverance. That has to come from inside; you can't legislate that.

But he also said that he was able to afford health insurance because of the Affordable Care Act. And he also said that because of the income-based repayment plan that we had put in place, where you only have to pay 10 percent of your income maximum in repaying your loans each month, that was what allowed him and his family to keep a roof over their heads and support themselves.

And so I'm here because Victor is the sort of person I'm working for every single day, somebody who never quits, somebody who is doing everything right, somebody who believes in the American Dream. Somebody who just wants a chance to build a decent life for himself and his family. And that's the vast majority of Americans. That's who I'm fighting for right here in Kansas City and all across this country. That's why I ran for President in the first place, to fight for folks like that.

Now, we all know it hasn't always been easy. The crisis that hit near the end of my campaign back in 2008, it would end up costing millions of Americans their jobs, their homes, their sense of security. But we have fought back. We have got back off our feet, we have dusted ourselves off. Today, our businesses have added nearly 10 million new jobs over the past 52 months. Construction is up. Manufacturing is back. Our energy, our technology, our auto industries, they're all booming.

The unemployment rate is at its lowest point since September of 2008. It's dropped faster than any time in 30 years. This morning we found out that in the second quarter of this year, our economy grew at a strong pace, and businesses are investing, workers are building new homes, consumers are spending, America is exporting goods around the world.

So the decisions that we made—to rescue our economy, to rescue the auto industry, to rebuild the economy on a new foundation, to invest in research and infrastructure, education—all those things are starting to pay off.

The world's number-one oil and gas producer—it's not Saudi Arabia, it's not Russia, it's the United States of America. We've tripled—we've tripled—the amount of electricity we get from wind. We've increased by 10 times the amount of electricity we get from the sun. And all that is creating tens of thousands of jobs across the country.

Our high school graduation rate is at a record high. More young people are earning their college degrees than ever before; 401(k)s have recovered their value. Home prices are rising.

And yes, millions of families now have the peace of mind, just like Victor's family does, of getting quality, affordable health care when you need it. It makes a difference in people's lives.

And look, Kansas City, none of this is an accident. It's thanks to the resilience and resolve of the American people. It's also thanks to some decisions that we made early on. And now America has recovered faster and come farther than just about any other advanced country on Earth. And for the first time in more than a decade, if you ask business leaders around the world what's the number-one place to invest, they don't say China anymore. They say the United States of America. And our lead is growing.

So sometimes, you wouldn't know it if you were watching the news, but there are a lot of good reasons to be optimistic about America. We hold the best cards. Things are getting better. The decisions we make now can make things even better than that. In fact, the decisions we make now will determine whether the economic gains that we're generating are broad based, whether they just go to a few at the top or whether we got an economy in which the middle class is growing and folks who are trying to get into the middle class have more rungs on the ladder, right? Whether ordinary folks are benefiting from growth.

And that's what's at stake right now, making sure our economy works for every American. See, I'm glad that GDP is growing, and I'm glad that corporate profits are high, and I'm glad that the stock market is booming. But what really I want to see is a guy working 9 to 5 and then working some overtime, I want that guy making more than the minimum wage.

And what I really want is somebody who has worked for 20, 30 years being able to retire with some dignity and some respect. What I really want is a family that they have the capacity to save so that when their child is ready to go to college, they know they can help and that it's affordable and that that child is not going to be burdened down with debt. That's the measure of whether the economy is working: not just how well it's doing overall, but is it doing well for ordinary folks who are working hard every single day and aren't always getting a fair shot? That's what we're fighting for. That's why I ran for President. That's what I'm focused on every day.

And that's what sometimes Washington forgets. Your lives and what you're going through day to day—the struggles, but also the opportunities and the hopes and the good things, but sometimes the rough things that happen—that's more important than some of the phony scandals or the fleeting stories that you see. This is the challenge of our time: How do we make sure we've got an economy that is working for everybody?

Now, all of you are doing your part to help bring America back. You're doing your job. Imagine how much further along we'd be, how much stronger our economy would be, if Congress was doing its job too. We'd be doing great. Every time I meet some of these folks who have written me letters, we sit down and talk, and they say, what's going on in Washington? Why—what they tell me is, if Congress had the same priorities that ordinary families did, if they felt the same sense of urgency about things like the cost of college or the need for increases in the minimum wage or how we're making childcare more affordable and improving early childhood education, if that's what they were thinking about, we could help a lot more families. A lot more people would be getting ahead. The economy would be doing better. We could help a lot more families, and we should.

We should be relentlessly focused on what I call an opportunity agenda, one that creates more jobs by investing in what's always made our economy strong: making sure that we're on the cutting edge when it comes to clean energy; making sure that we're rebuilding our

infrastructure—our roads, our bridges, our ports, our airports, our locks, our dams; making sure that advanced manufacturing is happening right here in the United States so we can start bringing manufacturing jobs back to the Midwest and all across the country, jobs that pay a good wage; investing in research and science that leads to new American industries; training our workers—really making a job training program and using our community colleges in ways that allow people to constantly retrain for the new opportunities that are out there and to prepare our kids for the global competition that they're going to face; making sure that hard work pays off with higher wages and higher incomes.

If we do all these things, we're going to strengthen the middle class, we'll help more people get into the middle class. Businesses, by the way, will do better. If folks have more money in their pocket, then businesses have more customers. If businesses have more customers, they hire more workers. You hire more workers, they spend more money. You spend more money, businesses have more customers, they hire even more workers. You start moving in the right direction. But it starts not from the top down, it starts from the middle out, the bottom up.

Now, so far this year, Republicans in Congress keep blocking or voting down just about every idea that would have some of the biggest impact on middle class and working class families. They've said no to raising the minimum wage. They've said no to fair pay, making sure that women have the ability to make sure that they're getting paid the same as men for doing the same job. They've said no for fixing our broken immigration system. Rather than investing in education, they actually voted to give another massive tax cut to the wealthiest Americans. And they've been pushing to gut the rules that we put in place after the financial crisis to make sure big banks and credit card companies wouldn't take advantage of consumers or cause another crisis. So they haven't been that helpful. *[Laughter]* They have not been as constructive as I would have hoped. *[Laughter]*

And these actions, they come with a cost. When you block policies that would help millions of Americans right now, not only are those families hurt, but the whole economy is hurt. So that's why this year, my administration, what we've said was, we want to work with Congress, we want to work with Republicans and Democrats to get things going, but we can't wait. So if they're not going to do anything, we'll do what we can on our own. And we've taken more than 40 actions aimed at helping hard-working families like yours. That's when we act: when Congress won't.

So when Congress failed to pass equal pay legislation, I made sure that women got more protection in their fight for fair pay in the workplace, because I think that when women succeed, everybody succeeds. I want my daughters paid the same as your sons for doing the same job.

Congress had the chance to pass a law that would help lower interest rates on student loans. They didn't pass it. I acted on my own to give millions of Americans a chance to cap their payments, the program that Victor has taken advantage of. I don't want our young people just saddled with debt before they've even gotten started in life.

When it comes to the minimum wage, last week marked 5 years since the last time the minimum wage went up. Now, you know the cost of living went up. The minimum wage didn't go up. So I went ahead on my own. When it came to Federal contractors, I said, you want to get a Federal contract, you've got to pay your workers at least \$10.10 an hour. And I've been trying to work with Governors and mayors, and in some cases with business owners, just calling them up directly. How about giving your folks a raise? And some of them have done it.

And since I had first asked Congress to raise the minimum wage, businesses like the Gap, you've got 13 States and DC, they've gone ahead and raised their minimum wage. It makes a difference in people's lives. And by the way, here's something interesting: The States that have increased their minimum wage this year, they've seen higher job growth than the States that didn't increase their minimum wage. So remember, you give them a little bit more money, businesses have more customers. They got more customers, they make more profit. They make more profit, what do they do? They hire more workers. America deserves a raise, and it's good for everybody.

So some of the things we're doing without Congress are making a difference, but we could do so much more if Congress would just come on and help out a little bit. *[Applause]* Just come on. Come on and help out a little bit. Stop being mad all the time. Stop just hating all the time. *[Laughter]* Come on. Let's get some work done together. *[Laughter]*

We actually—they did pass this workforce training act, and it was bipartisan. There were Republicans and Democrats, and everybody was all pleased. They came, we had a bill signing, and they were all in their suits. I said, didn't—doesn't this feel good? *[Laughter]* We're doing something. It's, like, useful. We're not—nobody is shouting at each other. *[Laughter]* You know? It was really nice. I said, let's do this again. Let's do it more often.

I mean, I know they're not that happy that I'm President, but that's okay. *[Laughter]* Come on. I've only got a couple of years left. Come on, let's get some work done. Then you can be mad at the next President.

Look, we've got just today and tomorrow until Congress leaves town for a month. And we've still got some serious work to do. We've still got a chance to—we got to put people to work rebuilding roads and bridges. And then the Highway Trust Fund is running out of money; we got to get that done. We've got to get some resources to fight wildfires out West. That's a serious situation. We need more resources to deal with the situation in the southern part of the border, right, with some of those kids. We got to be able to deal with that in a proper way.

So there's a bunch of stuff that needs to get done. Unfortunately, I think the main vote—correct me if I'm wrong here, Congressman—the main vote that they've scheduled for today is whether or not they decide to sue me for doing my job.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, no, no. First of all, don't—first of all, here's something I always say: Do not boo, vote. Booing doesn't help. Voting helps.

But think about this. The—they have announced that they're going to sue me for taking executive actions to help people. So they're mad because I'm doing my job. And by the way, I've told them—I said, I'd be happy to do it with you. So the only reason I'm doing it on my own is because you don't do anything. But if you want, let's work together.

Now, I mean, everybody recognizes this is a political stunt, but it's worse than that, because every vote they're taking like that means a vote they're not taking to actually help you. When they had taken 50 votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act, that was time that could have been spent working constructively to help you on some things. And by the way, you know who is paying for this suit they're going to file? You.

Audience member. No!

The President. No, no, you're paying for it. And it's estimated that by the time the thing was done, I would have already left office. So it's not a productive thing to do.

But here's what I want people to remember. Every single day, as depressing sometimes as what goes on in Washington may be, I see the inherent goodness and generosity of the American people. I see it every day. I see it in all of you. I saw it in the four people that I had dinner with last night.

In addition to Victor, one guy who joined us was a guy named Mark Turner. He works with high school dropouts to help get them back on track. He used to be a successful corporate executive, decided he wanted to give something back. You've got Valerie McCaw. Valerie is a single mom, engineer, owns a small business. She's doing great things. Even though sometimes it's a struggle making sure that she keeps her business afloat, she's persevered and is helping her son get his college education. Then you got Becky Forrest. She's a fireplug. She's president of the Town Fork Creek Neighborhood Association. She's got so many things going on—after-school programs and mentoring programs and basketball leagues and all kinds of things at a community center—I couldn't keep track of all of them. *[Laughter]*

And to listen to them talk, it made you optimistic. It reminded you there are good people out here. Everybody is out there trying to do their best, trying to look after their families, trying to raise their kids, trying to give something back, working with their church, working with their synagogues, working with their places of faith. Just trying to give something back and give some meaning to their lives. And they're responsible. And we all make mistakes, and we all have regrets, but generally speaking, people are decent.

And so the question is, how can we do a better job at capturing that spirit in Washington, in our Government? Because the American people are working harder than ever to support families, to strengthen communities. And so instead of suing me for doing my job, let's—I want Congress to do its job and make life a little better for the Americans who sent them there in the first place. Stop posturing.

And by the way, just—there's one place to start. I talked about this last week, but I want to talk about it a little more. Right now there's a loophole in the Tax Code that lets a small, but growing group of corporations leave the country; say—they declare themselves no longer American companies just to get out of paying their fair share of taxes, even though most of their operations are here, they've always been American companies, they took advantage of all the benefits of being an American company, but now their accountant has convinced them maybe they can get out of paying some taxes.

They're renouncing their citizenship even though they're keeping most of their business here. And I mean, it's just an accounting trick, but it hurts our country's finances, and it adds to the deficits and sticks you with the tab, because if they're not paying their share and stashing their money offshore, you're paying—you don't have that option. It ain't right. Not only is it not right, it ain't right. *[Laughter]* So—*[applause]*. It ain't right. I hope everybody is clear on the distinction. There are some things are not right. And then, there's some things that just ain't right. *[Laughter]* And this is—this ain't right. *[Laughter]*

I mean, you don't have accountants figuring all this stuff out for you, trying to game the system. These companies shouldn't either. And they shouldn't turn their back on the country that made their success possible. And by the way, this can be fixed. For the last 2 years, I've put forward plans to cut corporate taxes, make—close loopholes, make it more reliable, make it clearer. And to Republicans, I say, join with me. Let's work to close this unpatriotic tax

loophole for good. Let's use the savings that we get from closing the loophole to invest in things like education that are good for everybody.

Don't double down on top-down economics. Let's really fight to make sure that everybody gets a chance and, by the way, that everybody plays by the same rules. We could do so much more if we got that kind of economic patriotism that says we rise or fall as one Nation and as one people. And that's what Victor believes.

When Victor wrote me his letter, he said, "I believe, regardless of political party, we can all do something to help our citizens to have a chance at a job, have food in their stomachs, have access to great education and health care." That's what economic patriotism is. That's what we should all be working on.

Instead of tax breaks for folks who don't need them, let's give tax breaks to working families for—to help them pay for childcare and college. Don't reward companies shipping jobs overseas; let's give tax breaks to companies investing right here in Missouri, right here in the Midwest. Let's give every citizen access to preschool and college and affordable health care. And let's make sure women get a fair wage. Let's make sure anybody who is working full-time isn't living in poverty.

These are not un-American ideas, these are patriotic ideas. This is how we built America.

So just remember this: The hardest thing to do is to bring about real change. It's hard. You've got a stubborn status quo. And folks in Washington, sometimes, they're focused on everything but your concerns. And there are special interests, and there are lobbyists, and they're paid to maintain the status quo that's working for somebody. And they're counting on you getting cynical so you don't vote and you don't get involved and people just say, you know what, none of this is going to make a difference. And the more you do that, then the more power the special interests have, and the more entrenched the status quo becomes.

You can't afford to be cynical. Cynicism is fashionable sometimes. You see it all over our culture, all over TV; everybody likes just putting stuff down and being cynical and being negative, and that shows somehow that you're sophisticated and you're cool. You know what, cynicism didn't put a man on the Moon. Cynicism didn't win women the right to vote. Cynicism did not get a Civil Rights Act signed. Cynicism has never won a war. Cynicism has never cured a disease. Cynicism has never started a business. Cynicism has never fed a young mind.

I do not believe in a cynical America; I believe in an optimistic America that is making progress. And I believe despite unyielding opposition, there are workers right now who have jobs who didn't have them before because of what we've done and folks who got health care who didn't have it because of the work that we've done and students who are going to college who couldn't afford it before and troops who've come home after tour after tour of duty because of what we've done.

You don't have time to be cynical. Hope is a better choice. That's what I need you for.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:06 a.m. at the Uptown Theater. In his remarks, he referred to Victor L. Fugate, Jr., service coordinator, Missouri Department of Mental Health's Casco Area Workshop, Inc., who introduced the President, his wife Tiffany, and their daughter

Michaiah; Mark Turner, career coach, Full Employment Council, Inc.; and Valerie McCaw, president and owner, VSM Engineering LLC.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Kansas City, MO.

Locations: Kansas City, MO.

Names: Clay, W. Lacy, Jr.; Cleaver, Emanuel, II; Forrest, Becky; Fugate, Michaiah A.; Fugate, Tiffany K.; Fugate, Victor L., Jr.; James, Sylvester, Jr.; McCaw, Valerie; Nixon, Jeremiah W. "Jay"; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Turner, Mark.

Subjects: Business and industry : Offshore profits and operations; Civil rights : Wage equality; Disaster assistance : Wildfires, prevention and response efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, repayment options; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job training and assistance programs; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Immigration and naturalization : Unaccompanied alien children across U.S. Southwest border, increase; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Missouri : Arthur Bryant's Barbecue in Kansas City; Missouri : President's visit; Taxation : Corporate tax rates; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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